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TAKE TIME

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"Hey! That's cool! Come see what happened."

"Wow! How'd you do it?"

"Like this. See? Now watch what it does. Wait! I've got an idea. If I move this, I think it'll be even neater!"

"Yeah. Do it again. Come here, you guys. See what's happening!"

See what's happening! Throughout elementary classrooms there are exciting, messing-with-hands-on, look-what-I-found-out experiences happening! Students are using discovery-type science kits that provide opportunities to explore a wide range of topics. Motivation is generated by doing, and involvement is typical of science kits now available.

For several years the plea has been to individualize experiences in the classroom. Techniques in room structures (pods, movable walls, learning centers) and in teaching methods (contracts, team-teaching, open classroom concepts) attempted to set the stage for such individualization. Classrooms with permanent rows and every child on every page in every textbook on every day became known as traditional and were highly frowned upon by many educators. Teachers wanted to meet the needs of each child but were not necessarily skilled to do so.

Thus, it has been with great anticipation and expectation that students and teachers alike have participated in the adoption of new science programs. With motivation and individualization as practically built-in factors, learning occurs more easily for some students. Not for all? Whatever our views concerning "what is learning," or "how a child learns," we do know that people respond in a variety of ways to the same stimuli.

Perhaps, then, a caution is needed concerning the science stimuli available. Elementary children love adventure and action. They also love *new* adventures and *new* actions. Will children and adults continue to respond to a kit-concept program with enthusiasm, vitality, and imagination? Will teachers and learners continue to create new discoveries with a zest for exploration? What if the new science kit is due in three days to be replenished and sent on to another classroom? Will the teacher feel as pressured for time to complete experiences using this kit as she felt in former classrooms to complete chapter

four by the end of the first six weeks? Maybe more is needed for a total science program than motivation, participation, and individualization. How about variety in types of activities? Relevancy? Teachable moments? Humanization?

Somehow children don't measure learning—or science—or fun—by the time spent, number of experiences, or future goals. Their measurement scale tends to be concerned with the value of what's happning right now. The happening rates a value of "Wow!" if it is unique or rewarding for that child. A science teacher has heard about air pressure, and so have many science students. Yet there is still a special thrill when that old can contorts and collapses! The thrill is not directly caused by a concept about air pressure, but by the involvement in learning connected with that concept. That same student a half hour later may sparkle with a "guess what I just read about foxtails." It may not be the information on air pressure or foxtails that causes the excitement. It may not even be the demonstration, experiment, or reading per se that zings him with enthusiasm. However, it will be the involvement— student plus activity—that equals a meaningful experience.

So, if the lesson is on "Gases and Airs," and the class wants to name the mung bean—take time to share!

Or, if six groups are discovering properties of liquids with Kitchen Physics and one boy suddenly is turned on by investigating the device that regulates the speed with which the door closes—take time to do it!

Or, if the class is working with systems and viewing guppies, and one child whispers, "I saw a calf be born yesterday,"—take time to listen!

Or, if 24 students are Matching and Measuring and one brings you a third-generation cactus named Dr. Jekyll, that has just died—take time to care!

Let's be certain that with all the new materials, equipment, and wonderful opportunities we are still aware of that magical moment of learning. It cannot always be channeled into a 50-minute period, organized around a kit rotation system, or scheduled on Tuesday after gym class. It can, however, be coaxed and gently lifted from a variety of experiences.

Therefore, take time to set the stage for learning, but realize, too, that learning does not just take place on stage! There is a great deal of science beyond the spotlight. Take time to care what's happening!